

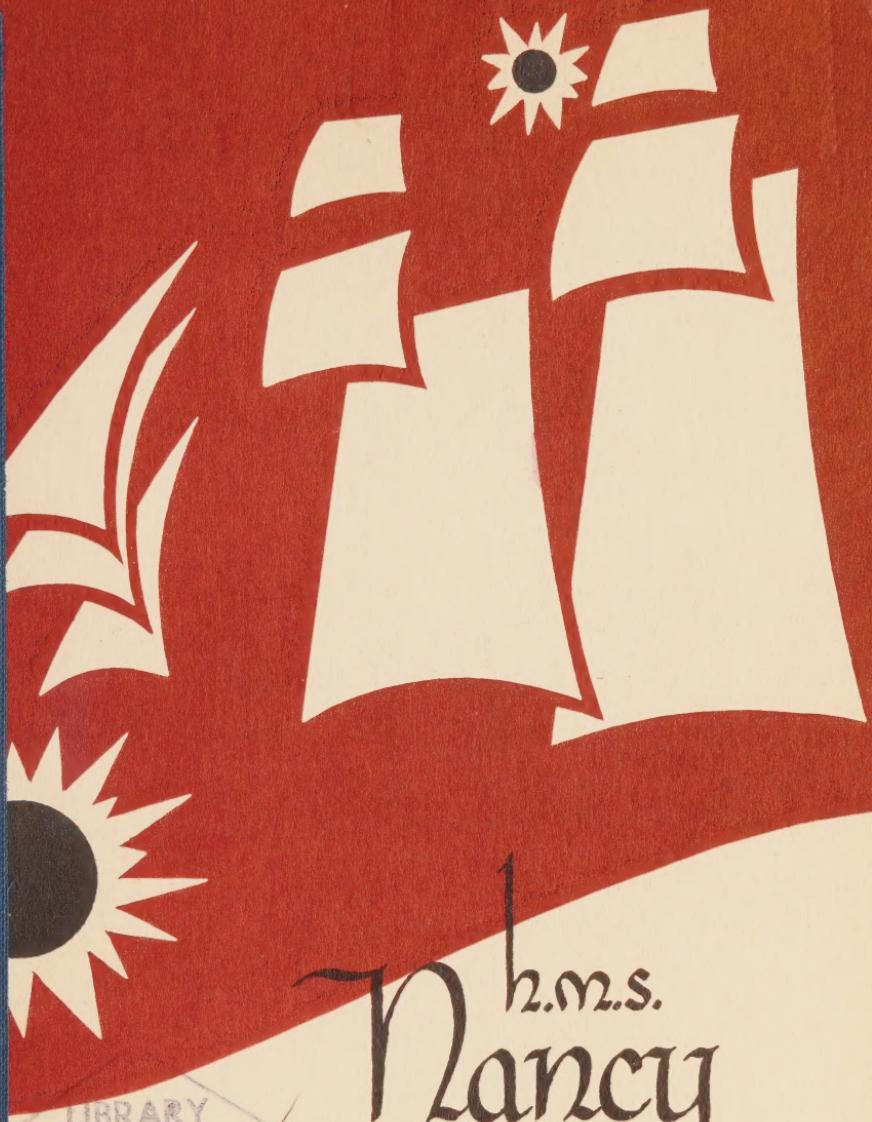
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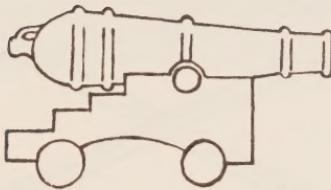
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Nancy and the war of 1812



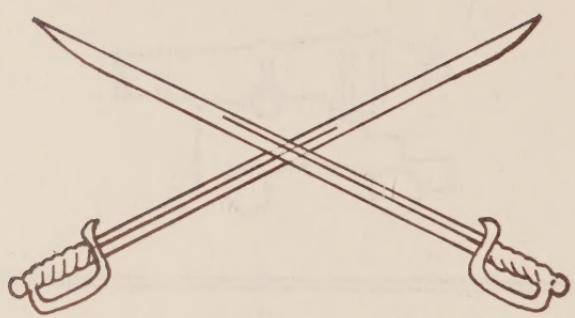
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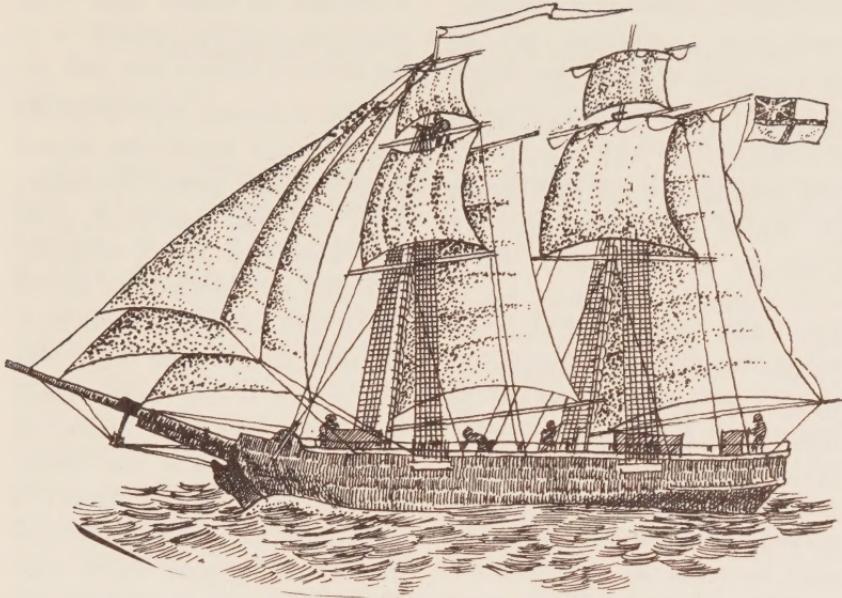


DEPARTMENT OF LANDS AND FORESTS

Hon. A. Kelso Roberts, Q.C. F. A. MacDougall
Minister Deputy Minister

1963





THE NANCY

This is the story of the Nancy, a schooner which sailed the Upper Great Lakes as a private cargo vessel. During the war of 1812, the Nancy was pressed into service as a British supply ship. While in this service, the schooner was destroyed in the Nottawasaga River by American Forces.

The sunken hull of the Nancy formed an obstruction in the river and an island was established by the resultant deposition of silt. The remains of the hull now rest in a museum on the island to mark the site of the Nancy's demise and to commemorate her gallant defence.

THE BEGINNING

The Nancy was built in 1789 at Detroit which was then British. The construction of the schooner was under the supervision of John Richardson of Forsyth, Richardson and Company of Montreal. There were probably no plans, but it has been determined that her length was approximately 80 feet, her width, or beam, 22 feet, and her depth of hold, eight feet. John Richardson wrote to his partner from Detroit in 1789:

"The schooner will be a perfect masterpiece of workmanship and beauty. The expense to us will be great, but there will be the satisfaction of her being strong and very durable. Her floor-timbers, keel, keelson, stem and lower futtocks are oak. The transom, stern-post, upper futtocks, top-timbers, beams and knees are all red cedar. She will carry 350 barrels."

Her figure-head, carved by Skelling of New York, was a "lady dressed in the present fashion with a hat and feather." The Nancy was probably named for either the wife or daughter

of John Richardson.

The schooner was built for the fur trade which she served by carrying goods including food, clothing, rum, meat, powder, blankets, tools, trinkets, weapons and ammunition up the lakes and returning with furs. At this time, there were two main ports in the West. Sault Ste. Marie governed access to Lake Superior and the North. Further west, in the Straits of Mackinaw, Fort Michilimackinac was a trading post which commanded Lake Huron, Lake Michigan and the West. This was the centre of activity in the northerly Great Lakes and the North West. It had been maintained by the French as early as 1687, but the British, in 1761, had been the first to build proper fortifications.

The launching of the Nancy took place at Detroit on November 24, 1789 and in the following spring, under the command of Captain William Mills, her maiden voyage took her to Fort Erie. After the launching, John Richardson wrote:

"She is spoken of here in

such high strain of encomium as to beauty, stowage and sailing that she almost exceeds my expectations."

In June, 1790, the Nancy took a full cargo to Grand Portage at Sault Ste. Marie. In 1793, the schooner was sold to George Leith and Company, merchants and fur traders, who toward the end of the century, sold her to the North West Fur Company. Captain Mills continued as commander until 1805 when he was succeeded by Captain Alexander Mackintosh. In the service of the North West Fur Company, the Nancy's function remained that of a transport for fur and merchandise on Lake Erie, Lake Huron and Lake Michigan.

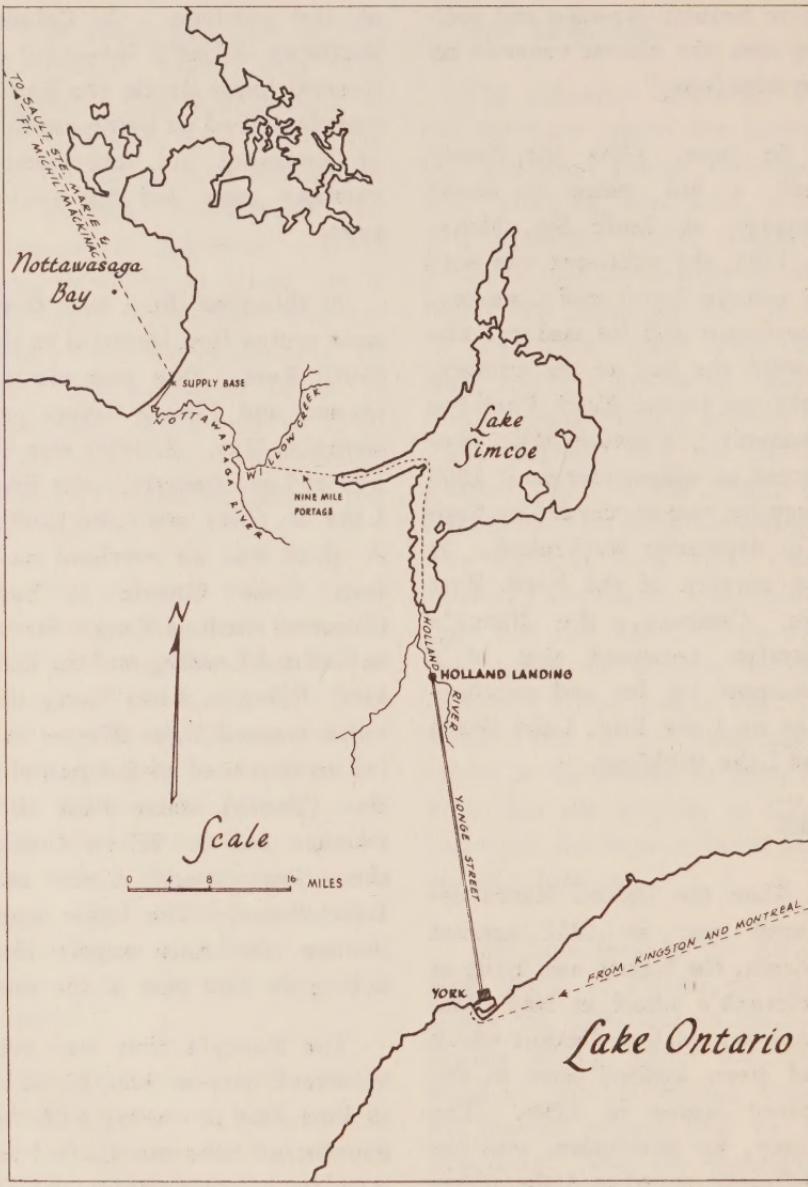
WAR

When the United States declared war in 1812 against Britain, the Nancy was lying at McIntosh's wharf at Moy (Windsor) across from Detroit which had been handed over to the United States in 1796. The Nancy, for protection, was immediately moved to Amherstburg and was requisitioned as a British transport by Lieutenant-

Colonel St. George, commander of the garrison. In Colonel Mathews Elliot's inventory to General Isaac Brock, the Nancy was described as being capable of mounting six four-pounder carriage guns and six swivel guns.

At this time there were three main routes from Montreal to the North West. One was via the Ottawa and French Rivers and Georgian Bay. Another was by way of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair and Lake Huron. A third was an overland route from Lake Ontario at York (Toronto) north on Yonge Street to Holland Landing and the Holland River. From here, the route entered Lake Simcoe and led to the head of Kempenfeldt Bay (Barrie) where Nine Mile Portage led to Willow Creek, the Nottawasaga River and Lake Huron. The latter route became the main supply line during the last year of the war.

The Nancy's first war service took her, on July 30, 1812 to Fort Erie in convoy with the Provincial Schooner Lady Prevost for military stores and 60 men of the 41st Regiment which participated in Brock's capture



of Detroit from General Hull. During that summer, and early autumn, the Nancy was employed constantly on Lake Erie between Detroit and Fort Erie in the transportation of stores and provisions.

On April 23, 1813 the Nancy was included in a small squadron to transport General Proctor's division from Amherstburg to Miami Bay for the unsuccessful attack on Fort Meigs. In the autumn, while the Nancy was away on a trip to Fort Michilimackinac, the British Fleet, on September 9, 1813 was decisively defeated in the Battle of Lake Erie. This action closed the supply route for the British on Lake Erie and left the Nancy as the sole surviving British ship on the Upper Lakes.

THE NANCY ESCAPES

Returning in the Nancy to the mouth of the St. Clair River on October 5, Captain Mackintosh found Detroit and Amherstburg in American hands, and two armed schooners and two gun-boats lying in wait for him. At noon, on the following day, the Nancy was under attack, but although damaged and set afire, she survived to escape into

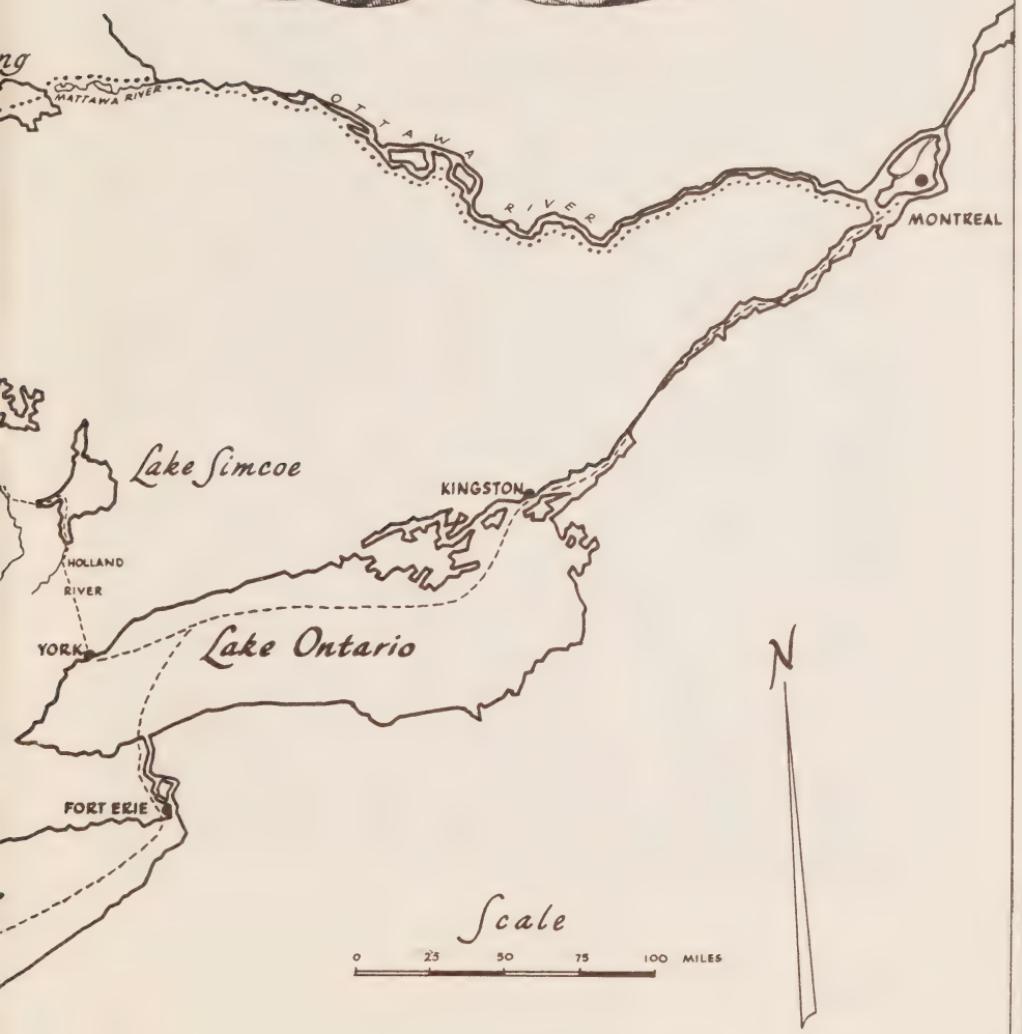
Lake Huron which she entered at 8.00 A.M. on October 7. Her destination was Sault Ste. Marie where she wintered and was refitted.

After the Battle of Lake Erie, the Americans planned to capture Fort Michilimackinac which they had lost on July 17, 1812. The Fort, with no naval defences, required reinforcements and in February, 1814, McDouall's relief party of 10 officers, 220 infantry and artillerymen, and 20 seamen left Kingston for the Fort. They arrived, via the Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga River route, on May 18. To aid in the defence of Fort Michilimackinac, it was planned to cut down the Nancy to a gunboat. This idea was discarded, however, and the British schooner continued as a transport. During that spring, the Nancy made three round trips from the Fort to the mouth of the Nottawasaga River for supplies.

While the Nancy was away on the fourth trip to the Nottawasaga supply base, the American Fleet left Detroit on July 3, 1814 for the attack on Fort Michilimackinac. At the Nottawasaga base, the Nancy was taken in charge by Lieu-



The three routes to the North-West



tenant Miller Worsley, Royal Navy, and taken two miles up the river. Here, quietly hidden and protected by a blockhouse, the Nancy waited.

DISCOVERY

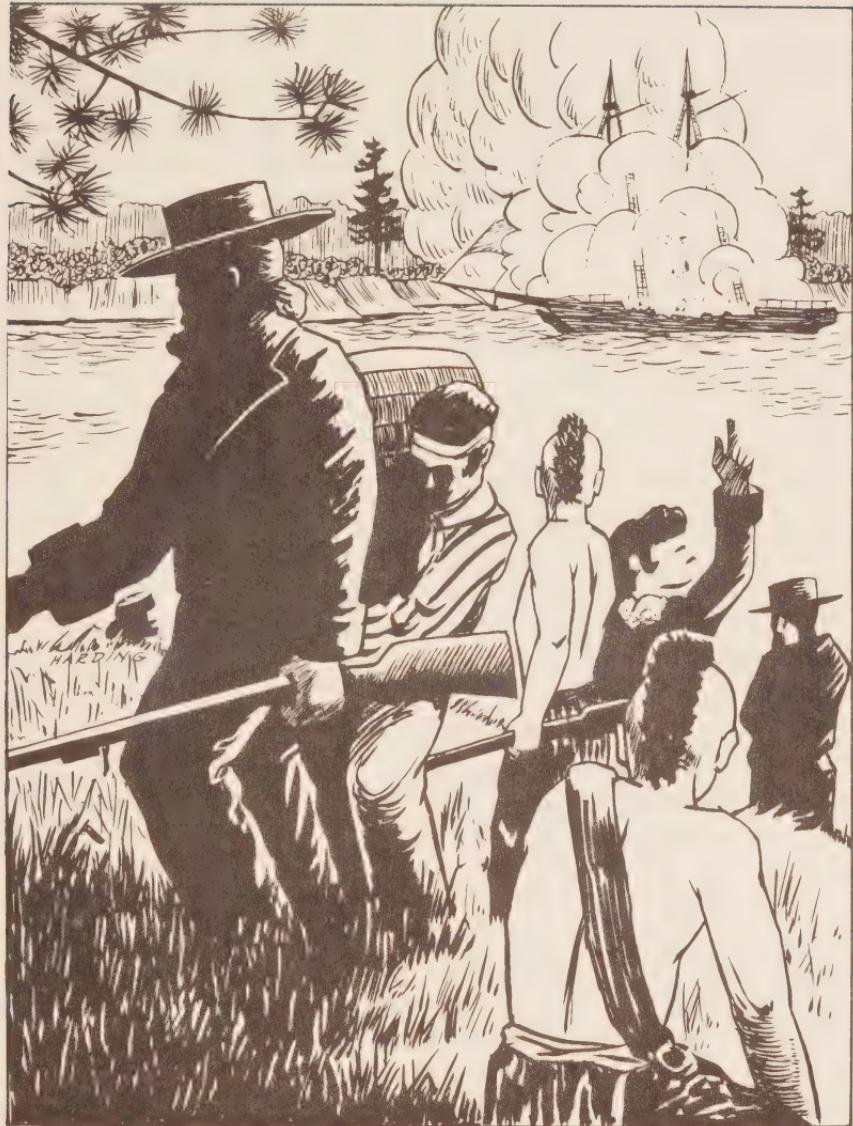
On August 13, three American ships, Niagara, Tigress and Scorpion, under the command of Captain Sinclair, arrived at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River to wait for the British schooner which was thought to be enroute from Fort Michilimackinac. It was only when wood-gathering parties from the American ships happened upon the Nancy's hiding place, that the secret was discovered.

The engagement was brief and decisive. Lieutenant Worsley's force consisted of 22 seamen, 23 Indians under the command of Lieutenant Ramsay Livingston, and nine French Canadian Voyageurs. Their armament was composed of two 24-pounder carronades and one six-pounder. The American force of three ships, and 500 men armed with 18 32-pounder carronades, three long 12-pounders, two 24-pounders

and one 5½ inch howitzer provided formidable odds. Captain Sinclair anchored his ships in the Bay and proceeded to pound the Nancy and the blockhouse across the narrow neck of land which separated the river from the bay.

The situation was hopeless. Lieutenant Worsley decided to destroy the Nancy rather than allow her to fall into enemy hands. During the preparations for blowing up the schooner, however, a direct hit on the blockhouse set the Nancy afire. She burned to the waterline and sank. The British force escaped into the forest where they were not pursued.

After the action, the Scorpion and Tigress were left to guard the river to prevent canoes and bateaux from getting supplies to Fort Michilimackinac. Eventually the river mouth was blocked with felled trees and the ships proceeded along the north shore in the hope of intercepting fur-laden canoes on the lake.



Lieut. Miller Worsley and his men escape into the forest while the Nancy burns.

THE NANCY AVENGED

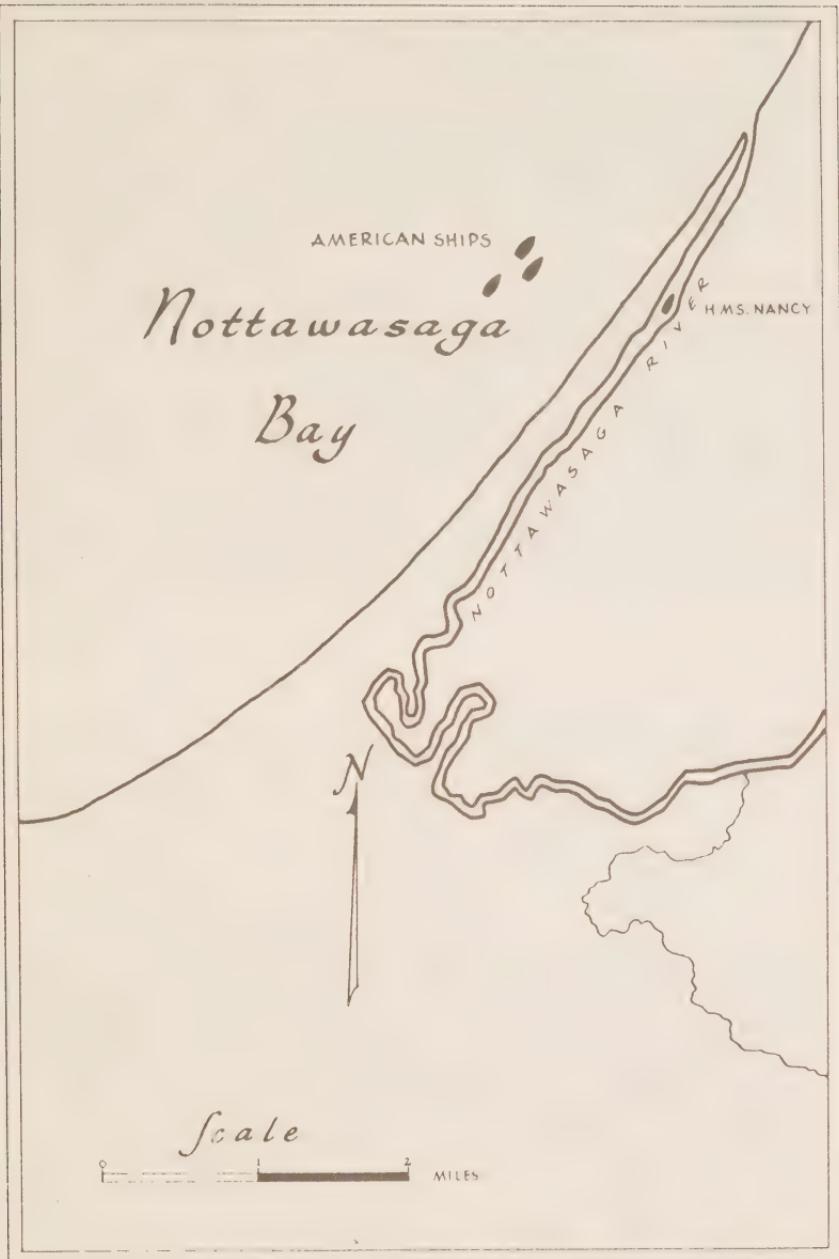
NANCY ISLAND

On August 31, Worsley and his men, after paddling and rowing for 360 miles, reached Michilimackinac. Enroute, they had quietly bypassed the Tigress and Scorpion. On September 3, Worsley and 92 men in four rowboats returned to surprise and capture the Tigress at midnight in Detour Passage. On the following day, the Scorpion was lured into position and also captured. Both vessels were then taken to Fort Michilimackinac. The Scorpion was renamed Confiance in honour of the ship which was captured from the French by Commodore Sir James Lucas Yeo. The Tigress was renamed Surprise for the manner in which she was captured.

After the war, for the loss of the Nancy, the Admiralty awarded the North West Fur Company 2,200 pounds. In addition, for two round trips between Detroit and Fort Erie in 1812, there was an award of 500 pounds, and for service in 1813 and 1814, 1,243 pounds, 5 shillings.

Gradually, the river currents deposited silt about the sunken hull and an island was formed. On July 1, 1911, Mr. C.J.H. Snider found the location of the hull which was just visible beneath the water and it was not until August, 1924 when an American 24-pounder roundshot was found in the river bank by Dr. F.J. Conboy that interest was renewed. During the summer of 1925 the long-covered hull was found by Dr. Conboy whose interest in the Nancy had been aroused by Mr. Snider.

The Dominion and Provincial Governments and many individuals became interested in the historic site, and in 1928 the hull was raised and placed on the island. On August 14, 1928, 114 years after the gallant defence of the Nancy, the Nancy Museum was officially opened to commemorate this episode in the war of 1812.



Position of American ships and the Nancy

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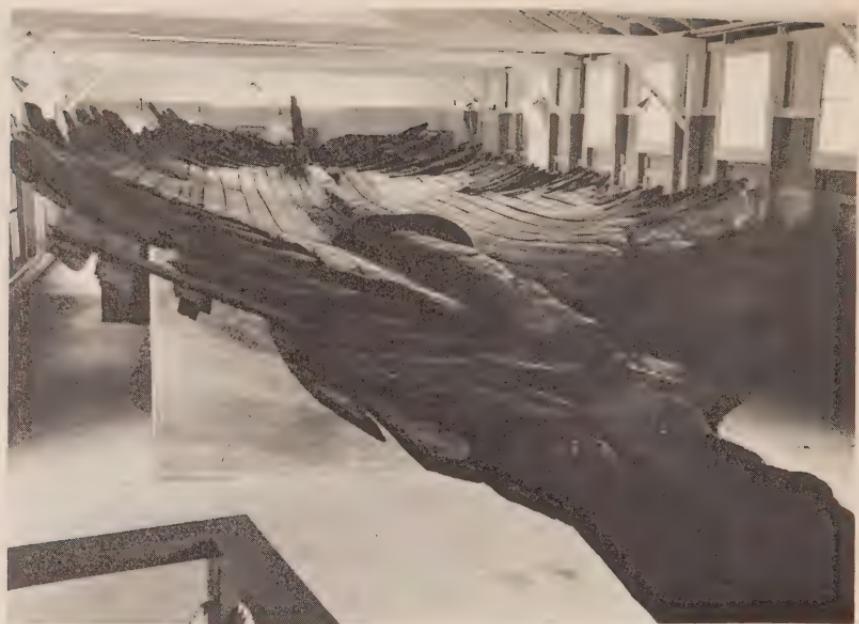
"Report on the Schooner Nancy", Archives of the Province of Ontario, Toronto, 1925.



The recovery of the bull in 1927.

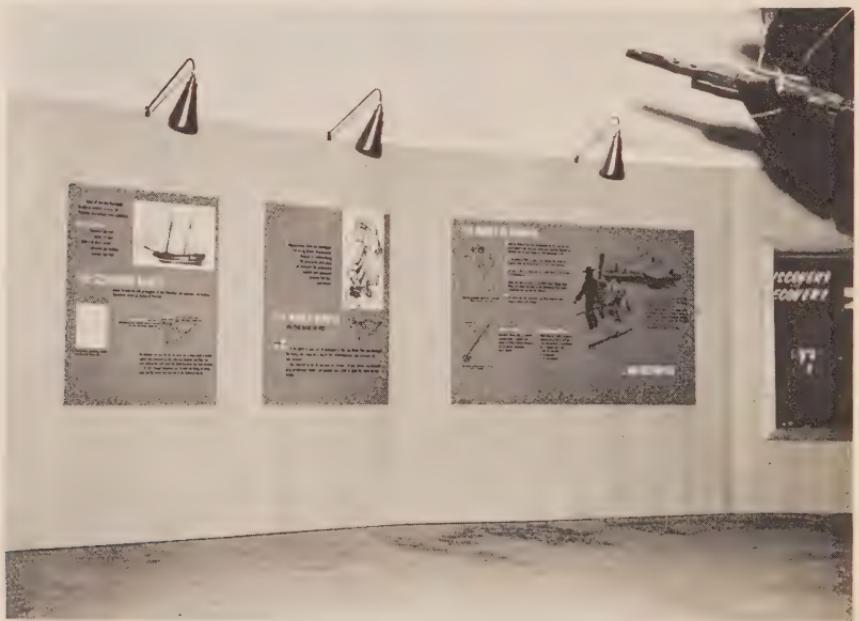
(below) Nancy Island Museum.





The recovered hull of the Nancy.

(below) The exhibit wall of the Museum.





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